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CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Several items which have recently appeared in the newspapers focus sharply on the issue at hand in this paper. A few months ago the Pope visited the Holy Land, no longer (if indeed it ever had been) a center of Christian influence, but rather a hotbed of nationalism sparked on the one hand by Moslem religious fervor, and on the other by secular Jewish ambition. During the second session of Vatican II the council fathers were exploring the possibilities of promulgating a more tolerant attitude toward other traditions within the Christian Faith. This was commonly referred to as the "freedom of conscience" schema. And during this second session the larger question of Catholic versus Buddhist screamed at us from the headlines of our newspapers. Before the coup in Viet Nam that overthrew the Roman Catholic regime of Ngo Dinh Diem, the world's attention was drawn to the spectacle of self-immolation on the part of dedicated Buddhists thus protesting the repression of their religion by the Diem regime. Feeling was so high that the Pope felt constrained to call upon Diem to stop the alleged persecution. All of these news items are connected, and all raise the question of the attitudes with which Christians perceive their non-Christian neighbors in the world.

Paul Tillich reflects that it wasn't until the 7th century when the Christians first came into contact with Islam that Christianity ever really faced up to the question of co-existence with another major non-Christian religion.¹ But the world was a large place then and the two world religions lived side by side with little commerce and really little significant warfare between them. Both, apparently, were ignorant of the religious movements on the Indian sub-continent and on the large land mass we call Asia. But the situation is much different today. It is trite to say that the world is smaller and getting more so every day, but it is nonetheless true. Not only has the apparent distance between places been shortened by modern communication and advanced means of travel, but the population of the world is expanding by marked degrees. There are simply more people adhering to the major world religions, and many of these people are coming into close personal contact with adherents of a major religion foreign to them. There is moreover a real sense in which the world is now more than ever one. Robert Slater in a recent book² perceives this community as a given in the modern world and points out that a re-evaluation of the Christian attitude toward other world religions is not

¹Paul Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter with the World Religions, p. 38.

²Robert L. Slater, World Religions and World Community.

a matter of academic study, but a matter of life and death. John Donne's words applied to peoples, nations and religions were never so pregnant with truth. The proliferation of alphabetical alliances into which the United States has entered since the last War offers testimony to the fact that what happens in Madagascar or Cyprus really does have an impact on the lives of the people in Des Moines.

Moreover, within the last two or three decades the other world religions, in partial response to the reality of world community have experienced a renaissance. Philosophical Hinduism has become a force in the world that is felt at least on the campuses of every major institution of higher learning. In our own political life we have seen certain quasi-Indian principles 'baptized' and used in the racial conflicts by such men as Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. There is also among the major non-Christian world religions a reinspired missionary outlook. Canon Johnson described one such situation in West Africa. "For every one West African who becomes a Christian, ten become followers of the Prophet i.e., Mohammed . It is as simple as that and as drastic as that. Already we are out-numbered. Shortly we shall become overwhelmed. I see no way of arresting the trend."³ There is also a searching

³Howard A. Johnson, Global Odyssey, pp. 56-57.

process within all of the traditions, Christianity included, to come to grips with this new fact of life--a situation in which we are all thrown closely together like the dwellers in a huge city apartment block and in which the actions of one affect immediately the actions of another who may be radically different from the first.

Christianity too is attempting to come to grips with this new situation, and the dynamics of this process are painful and sometimes destructive. Some would argue that Christianity should come to terms with itself and its offspring (such as technology) before attempting to move into this vital area. Publications such as those of the Bishop of Woolwich and of Paul Van Buren represent such attempts within Christianity to come to a modern understanding of itself and its theological undergirding.

The question of the relationship of Christianity to the other world religions is really a sub-question of the Church-World question--a question which has continuing relevancy, and one which may never find an answer for all times and places. The question also involves a problem in the understanding of revelation and of the 'natural man'. The question must also touch upon the religion-culture debate (a debate not unlike the chicken-egg question). The problem calls for a distillation of 'essentials' and it brings up the problem

of Christianity vs. the concept of religion and of both over against the Gospel. Today there is great confusion existing within Christianity itself, as well as among those who look at Christianity, about God, Jesus, the Gospel, and Christianity. In short, the relationship between Christianity and other world religions is a thoroughly theological question involving the whole 'circle' of theology. This means that an individual's response to the question, or his thoughts on it, will be conditioned and inextricably involved with his other theological positions. This then gives some idea of how we might approach a study of this kind.

After a hurried historical sketch we must begin with a consideration of the question of natural revelation and natural theology, because the view one takes in this area predetermines the approach to and view of the non-Christian religions. We will limit the consideration of modern theologians to three: Barth, Brunner, and Tillich. In addition to the theologians we will also consider other points of view such as those of Toynbee, Hocking, Slater and Boquent--men who are historians, philosophers and professors of world religions. There are also the missionaries--the men who actually deal with this problem from day to day. Their view in contemporary terms is represented by Newbigin and Kraemer.

There are, as one pursues the literature, several cate-

gories which suggest themselves and into which the ideas of various men fall more or less. Obviously, the categorizing of a particular viewpoint poses a problem. The limits of the category--the label stamping--are arbitrary and of necessity not always accurate. These labels should be considered as methodological tools and not dogmatic pigeon holing.

This paper will not attempt to consider directly the attitude which Christianity should take toward secularism and Marxism which some have also called world religions. These like technology (if you accept the proposition that religion produces the culture) are children, or products, or perhaps heresies of Christianity. There is no denying the relevance of this problem and we must affirm that it is a central part of the Church-World question and certainly a part of Christianity's search for self understanding. Tillich in fact places the highest priority on this question.

"...the main characteristic of the present encounter of the world religions is their encounter with the quasi-religions of our time. Even the mutual relations of the religions proper are decisively influenced by the encounter of each of them with secularism, and one or more of the quasi-religions which are based upon secularism."⁴

The question is not excluded because of the lack of importance, but rather because of the limitation of space. Also, the suggested approaches to non-Christian world religions

⁴Paul Tillich, op. cit., p. 5.

will have direct implications for the question of the quasi-religions, if not direct applicability.

A paper such as this must also take seriously the content of the Bible--the Biblical witness. But the Biblical witness itself is the cause for some anxiety among Christians as they consider this question. The attitude of many toward non-Christian religions is based primarily on an uncritical exegesis of John 14:6. We have not found any scheme of thought where-by the fact of the co-existence of living, self-assured religions and the words 'No man cometh unto the Father but by Me' might be harmoniously reconciled. Either we dismiss the religions too lightly--their certainty of themselves always being in contradiction and opposition to the sole and final validity of the revelation in Christ--or we feel impelled, for the sake of this sole and final validity, to set aside the things in the religions which we cannot honestly overlook, such as the human element of the good and the saving strength which dwells within them. We find ourselves asking the question despite John 14:6: Are they really so devoid of salvation as we are apparently bound to conclude?

On the other hand, whether we turn to the prophetic representation of God identifying the Persian Cyrus as 'mine annointed' and 'the rod of mine anger' or to the words

of Jesus in which he says of the Roman officer that he has not found such faith in all Israel, the Old and New Testaments together affirm that the freedom of God is not compromised by his special activity within the Old and New Israel. He is also at work beyond the special history in the wider history. Nor can these two histories be separated. Throughout the Bible, from Genesis 12.3--'in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed'--right up to the grand image of future hope in Revelation 7--the assembly of many nations and tongues before the throne of the lamb--it is constantly stated that God has those outside the 'Israels' in mind.

The Biblical witness then calls for an inclusive view over against an exclusive view of the world. Yet we have the testimony of St. John and the testimony of Christian missionary history since the Reformation on the side of exclusiveness--or what Toynbee and Radhakrishnan call 'intolerance'. But 'tolerance' and its cognate forms requires a more precise definition than muddy 'permissiveness'. By tolerance we mean respect for the integrity of the other person. By Radhakrishnan's standard Paul on the Areopagus at Athens was 'intolerant' toward the religion manifestly practiced. But the account of his preaching in Acts shows that he respected the integrity of his hearers. By this definition Paul as

apostle to the Gentiles is Christianity's paradigm of tolerance.

We have noted the importance and the relevance of the problem of finding a Christian response to the fact of living non-Christian religions. We have also noted the tension between the Biblical witness and recent Christian missionary history taking its cue from John 14:6. We have considered the charge of 'intolerance' and have chosen to side with St. Paul and the early Christians who clearly exhibited a tolerance toward non-Christians defined as respect for the integrity of the other person, but with Christ as the ultimate criterion.

In the chapters to follow we will survey the attitudes that Christians have toward other religions, and several approaches that have been proposed. In the final portion of the last chapter and in the concluding remarks the view with which I have the most sympathy and which I think has the most promise in the present world situation is presented.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL SURVEY

In the 1964 Kellogg Lectures, A. Theodore Eastman suggested that historically there were four principal categories into which the attitude of Christians toward the non-Christian religions fitted. He listed them as (1) All religions are pretty much the same, or "the golden rule" attitude; (2) All religions other than Christianity are false, or "works of the devil" attitude; (3) All religions reflect human striving after God, or "the Christian pursuit" attitude; and (4) Christianity is the fulfillment of the other religions, or "the older and wiser brother" attitude.¹ Using Mr. Eastman's basic framework we will consider some examples of these attitudes and the place of each in recent history.

The modern history of missions did not really begin until nearly two hundred years after the Reformation. The Christian attitude displayed at this time is best gleaned from the diaries of the missionaries of the time. One such missionary was the Rev. Henry Martyn, chaplain to the Honorable East India Company. In an account of his life, we read the following lines.

¹A. Theodore Eastman, "The Missionary Task in a Single World Civilization" (Kellogg Lectures, February 6, 1964).

In a dark wood...he heard the cymbals and drums summoning the poor natives to the worship of devils;--sounds which pierced his heart. And before a black image, placed in a pagoda, with lights burning around it, he beheld his fellow creatures prostrating themselves, with their foreheads to the earth;--a sight which he contemplated with an overwhelming compassion, whilst "he shivered," he says, "as if it were in the neighborhood of hell."²

This attitude continued for the most part until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Today few, if any, missionaries in the main stream of protestantism would subscribe to the attitude which characterized this early modern period.

Near the end of the nineteenth century there was a marked change in the attitude toward non-Christian religions. No doubt many factors led to this change. One, unquestionably was the great number of scientific studies of non-Christian religions which were becoming available--many of them by Christian scholars. Another factor leading to the change of attitude was the increasing contact with noble lives among non-Christian people giving a better understanding of how their faith actually functioned. At this time too Christians were beginning to come to grips with the problem of communication. The Christian Gospel had to be conveyed to the non-Christian in intelligible terms. Consequently the non-Christian religions were examined for a "point of contact" to

²John Sargent, Memoir of the Rev. Henry Martyn, B.D. (New York:Protestant Episcopal Society for the Promotion of Evangelical Knowledge, 1817) p. 144.

which the Gospel might be more properly addressed. During this period Christianity tended to be thought of as the 'fulfillment' of the non-Christian religions. An example of the thought at this time is represented by the work of J. N. Farquhar.

Christ provides the fulfillment of the highest aspirations and aims of Hinduism. A little reflection...will show that every line of light which is visible in the grossest parts of the religion reappears in Him set in healthy institutions and spiritual worship.... In Him is focused every ray of light that shines in Hinduism. He is the Crown of the faith of India.³

The 1928 Jerusalem Conference of the International Missionary Council reflected the spirit of the time by choosing its themes around the "value" of the non-Christian Religions. Out of the Conference came a call for an "indigenous Christianity", a call to recognize the "noble spiritual heritage" of the great religions, and a plea that Christians should adopt a less dogmatic attitude toward the non-Christian faiths.

This general attitude has in recent times been severely criticised by the continental theologians, notably Barth. The rise of Biblical theology has also tempered the view outlined above. The fulfillment view because of its patronizing attitude is not well received by the non-Christian

³J. N. Farquhar, The Crown of Hinduism, 1915, pp. 457-458.

world, many of whom are practicing a religion at least as old if not older than Christianity. In Islam the "older and wiser brother" approach seems patently ridiculous inasmuch as the followers of the Prophet cast themselves in the same role to some extent. Some of Brunner's critics suggest that he fits into this category, but we will reserve comment on this and Brunner's view until a later point.

Albert Schweitzer in a series of lectures delivered five years before the Jerusalem Conference commented that although the religions of the East might be more logical as systems of faith, they were void of ethical character since there was no "event" backing them up.⁴ The lectures are interesting because they are the first words of the modern reaction to the "fulfillment" school.

Although there is a call from the continent to turn away from the "fulfillment" approach there has been another reaction which has spokesmen both East and West. This reaction has two sides: (1) The "Symmachus Syndrome"⁵ which states that all religions are heading toward the same goal, and (2) that there is an "essence" of religion that is really

⁴Albert Schweitzer, Christianity and the Religions of the World.

⁵So called because of a remark allegedly made by Symmachus in the Roman Senate in criticism of the establishment of Christianity by Constantine.

the same in each of the religions. The first of these sides is represented by Radhakrishnan and Toynbee, the second by Hocking and Slater. This reaction comes under Mr. Eastman's "golden rule" category. This viewpoint must be taken seriously because of the prominence of the men espousing it. Radhakrishnan is vice-president of his nation and the leading Hindu apologist. Toynbee is a historian of popular acclaim. Writing in Horizon magazine, Toynbee made this statement:

It is, of course, impossible that each of the higher religions can be right in believing that it has a monopoly of truth and salvation; but it is not at all impossible that all of them should have found alternative roads to salvation and should have seen truth, 'through a glass darkly,' in one or another of truth's different facets.⁶

Radhakrishnan is quoted in Cooke in the following statement:

Religions, despite their negative and mutually intolerant features are all engaged in the common effort to build a higher and more stable life. They are fellow workers toward the same goal.⁷

The views of these men are popular in certain circles because of their 'liberality' and undogmatic tenor. A closer examination of both these views reveals, however, that they are dogmatic about being undogmatic. Nonetheless, in a world torn by strife and cold war their view holds the promise of peaceful co-existence at least between the religions of the

⁶Arnold J. Toynbee, "The Historian's Struggle with Religion" in Horizon, (January, 1961) p. 65.

⁷Gerald Cooke, As Christians Face Rival Religions, p. 119.

world. It is very understandable that this answer affects many people favorably because it seems to end the dispute concerning the religions.

This answer is possible only if we ignore the fact that the religions are very different from one another, even contradictory. Such a view is ultimately based on a religious agnosticism, a lurking sense that man has really no true knowledge of God. If all religions are equally true, then the inevitable corollary is that all religions are equally false. Hinduism, for example, is at war with any religion claiming to be based on a historic revelation--it withdraws from the world. H. E. Root, writing in Soundings, put it this way, "If there are no grounds for believing that a Christian scheme is preferable to some non-Christian one, the choice between Christianity and some other religion.... becomes...arbitrary."⁸ Hardly acceptable, therefore, when considering one's 'ultimate concern'.

The men who hold the theory of an "essence" of religion are as prominent in academic circles as Toynbee and Radhakrishnan are in popular opinion. Of these men Slater is the most contemporary. In a recently published book, he seeks to find the "essence" in what he calls "depth religion". He

⁸H. E. Root, "Beginning All Over Again" in Soundings, Alec Vidler, editor. p. 13.

holds that behind or beneath all the manifest diversity in the religions of the world there is something in the very nature of the religious response that is fundamentally unifying. The great appeal of this lies apparently in the 'non-theological' approach.

This is an attempt to go beyond the obstacles presented by intellectual and confessional differences. Because such statements cannot communicate the full richness of the depth symbols, they are not treated as being of first importance. Intellectual statement is given only a secondary role.⁹

The argument of both Slater and Hocking, the other man representing this view, rests upon the emergence of a world culture and the necessary (in their view) corollary of a "world faith". Hocking finds the "essence" of each religion in mysticism. He suggests that as believers are challenged to distinguish what is really vital to their religion and what is not a reconception will take place within the religion. The religion will not be less itself as a result but more itself.

So far as the essences of precept and doctrine are concerned, the agreements which the mystic discern are not similarities, they are identities....The several universal religions are already fused together, so to speak, at the top.¹⁰ (emphasis his)

⁹Robert L. Slater, World Religions and World Community, pp. 198 ff.

¹⁰William E. Hocking, The Coming World Civilization, pp. 148-149.

The holders of the "essence" of religion view find their roots in Schleiermacher who held that there was a 'religion in the religions' lying at the base of all religions. One problem with the view embraced by Slater and Hocking lies in their anthropology. With them it is the faith of the individual that is all important. The concept is man-centered not God centered. Even Satan believes and all his angels! A second problem is that they start with the world civilization and seek to find a 'religion in the singular' as the cement to bind this world together. The fallacy lies in the priority of consideration. Against the naturalistic-humanist and social anthropologist error we must re-assert that the culture does not produce the religion which binds it together; rather it is the religion which supplies the motor power and inspiration for the culture. The world civilization is mainly a product of Western civilization which is clearly resultant from the impact of Christianity upon the world. Brunner gives us a further caution in this area.

For a theology of mission this means that at all times and in all places the Church must make its witness, but that it must never put its faith in any of the movements of history.... The Christian mission is an activity within history, but it is not a product or result of history.¹¹

¹¹H. V. White, "Brunner's Missionary Theology" in The Theology of Emil Brunner, Charles W. Kegley, editor. p. 65.

The ideas of all the men cited under this "golden rule" category are very popular but it is evident that problems like world peace and stability are not yielding to the wishful thinking of this supposed aura of tolerance. When the call is uttered for a 'religion in the singular' to serve the pragmatic ends of world peace and world stability the great religions 'in the plural' come immediately forward with the necessity of defining their possible contribution to the service required. It is a dubious matter to look upon religion as a tool to be used to provide a truly unified world by men who are religiously indifferent.

Because Slater, Hocking, Radhakrishnan and Toynbee all use the concept of "tolerance" it is worth while to consider in more detail the meaning of this word before we move on in our considerations. It is the more worth while because the concept of "tolerance" has a significant popular appeal during these days of nationalistic and racial intolerance. The word is pregnant with "peace". This word for these men stands over against the idea of the "exclusiveness" and the "finality" of Christianity. Let us first consider the meaning of these concepts.

It has been a common mistake--especially during the colonialist expansion period of Christian missions--to seek the finality for Christianity in the wrong place, that is,

in its institutional forms of expression, in creeds, moral codes, organization, and ritual. This is a static concept of finality and is belied by the coexistence of Christian fellowships found in the World Council of Churches. The finality that can be claimed is only the acknowledgement of the finality and absoluteness of Christ and his work of atonement. None of us claim finality in our understanding of it. Furthermore the concept of finality implies a progressive theory of religions--a continuum of religious striving by man, a progressive proximation in attaining to the Truth. It is perfectly true that secular philosophers of religion distinguish between primitive and great or 'higher' religions. But against this progressive-evolutionary scheme stands the claim of each of the great religions that it itself is absolute against all the others which are considered either only partially true or completely false. Tillich notes that there is progress, obsolescence and regression on the cultural side of every religion as well as in its self-understanding and aesthetic form.¹² But this does not imply a progress of revelation or a progressive approximation of Truth. Even Christianity or the groups within the World Council do not claim finality for themselves in this fashion. The finality is claimed in the event of

¹²Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology Vol III, 1963, p. 336.

Christ. A Christian is loyal only to Christ.

It is not Christianity as a religion that is absolute but the event by which Christianity is created and judged to the same extent as any other religion, both affirmatively and negatively. This view of the religions...is not horizontal, but vertical.¹³

One of the truly remarkable things about Christianity as a religion is its character and capacity for radical self criticism. This self criticism extends to the very documents it regards as holy. There are few signs that non-Christian scholars are realizing the importance of such a study of their own religious documents. But Christians have not only led the way in such study, but declare unequivocally that Christianity has gained immensely from this impartial criticism. This represents 'progress' in self understanding within Christianity; a progress that is not yet manifest in the other world religions as they seek self understanding in the modern world. This impartial study represents an attitude of inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness insofar as self criticism is practiced and outside criticism is taken seriously.

The 'exclusiveness' of Christianity has nothing to do with religious arrogance, intolerance or dogmatic absolutism. It rather includes a real openness to the truth, wherever it might be found and manifests itself in an inclusiveness of

¹³Ibid., p. 338.

its own sort far more realistic and adequate to the human situation than the superficial, idealistic, universalistic theories of the East and the theosophical and philosophical syncretists and synthethisers of the West as they propose the "One Way" they purport to see within each of the religious manifestations of mankind.

Real religious tolerance means taking man and his religions seriously. This tolerance must not be confused with the clever rationalist who deals with the religions in the light of a concept of a 'perfect' religion that is evolving in history. Karl Barth observes that tolerance of this kind is unattainable because man and his religions are patronized and not really taken seriously. He says that this 'tolerance' "...will see man carried, like an obstinate child in the arms of his mother, by what God has determined and done for his salvation despite his own opposition."¹⁴

The 'tolerance' proposed by the Asian religions and such men as Toynbee is based on skepticism of man's intellectual formulas. The tolerance of Christianity is an insistence on the Truth in love. No other religions have this idea in them.

¹⁴Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. I/2 (G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, editors. New York:Scribners, 1956) p. 299.

The Christian faith is only a right response to the revelation in Christ if it is tolerant. It is against God's character...it is against the life, work, and death of Christ to be intolerant... In principle Christianity is the only tolerant religion, because the nature of the Gospel demands this, and well-understood Christianity is the only guarantee and creator of tolerance.¹⁵

In Mr. Eastman's category of religion as the "striving after God" there is one outstanding representative today-- Karl Barth. We will reserve exposition and comment on this viewpoint until a later chapter. It deserves to be treated in detail and at length because of the immense influence Barth exercises over the current theological scene.

Before moving on to a consideration of Barth, Brunner and Tillich, we will in the next chapter discuss the concept of Natural Revelation and Natural Theology. It is around this topic the debate and controversy between these men is generated. It is an important topic because their understanding of it determines directly the attitude each of them takes toward the non-Christian religions. In our consideration of each of these 'main-line' theologians of the modern scene we will also consider some 'men in the field' who derive their theological perspective from these men. It is dangerous to consider a man such as Kraemer to be completely dependent on Barth because Kraemer does occa-

¹⁵Hendrik Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith (London:Lutterworth Press, 1956) p. 373.

sionally show a point of contact with Brunner and even Tillich. This is so because a missionary is not bound by the rules of logical consistency to the same degree as is a systematic theologian. How this is true will be considered in detail when Kraemer and Newbigin are discussed more fully.

CHAPTER III

REVELATION IN THE CREATION AND NATURAL THEOLOGY

From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, My Name is great among the gentiles; in every place incense is offered unto my Name and a pure offering. (Malachi 1:11, KJV)

The debate about general revelation or natural revelation and natural theology in modern protestant theology centers around such passages as the one cited above and the first two chapters of Romans.¹ It is the main point at stake in the continuing discussion between Barth and Brunner. It is no surprise that each have written a commentary on the Epistle to the Romans and are markedly different in their exegetical results on the passages in question.² In this discussion Paul Tillich stands apart and aloof due perhaps to his position as a Christian philosopher. Being a philosopher, he works naturally from the logos spermatikos concept which has ancient roots in the philosophic tradition.

Karl Barth accepts the idea of a general revelation in creation, a natural revelation initiated by God. But his

¹A partial list of the passages in question is: Rom. 1:18ff; Rom. 1:28-32; Rom. 2:14-15; John 1:4,9; Acts 14:17; Acts 17:27ff.

²Compare the exegesis, for example, of Romans 2:14-15 in Karl Barth, A Shorter Commentary on Romans, pp. 36-37, and Emil Brunner, The Letter to the Romans, p. 21.

position calls into question the definition of revelation. Is there a revelation if there is no one receiving the message? The extent to which the concept of general revelation is diminished in significance may be seen from the following.

In Romans 1:18 f. Paul clearly says that God was present in His world--yes, in his acts and revelation. But man did not see God's revelation.³ (emphasis his)

For Barth the Christ event is all illuminating. Then the general revelation takes on meaning, becomes revealing. Before this time the general revelation is relatively meaningless.

The weak affirmation of general or natural revelation is followed by a resounding "No" to any idea of natural theology. He will not and cannot deny that God works and has worked in man outside the Biblical sphere of revelation, but how this has happened he refuses to discuss. Commenting on the same passage Barth continues, "As a Christian Paul is willing to admit the revelation of God in the whole world, but he derives no knowledge of God from this.... Yes, a Christian will say this, but he will not become a natural theologian."⁴ (emphasis his) His opposition to the idea of Natural Theology is in part due to his peculiar theological

³J.D. Godsey, Karl Barth's Table Talk, pp. 46-47.

⁴Ibid.

starting point and the basis of his system--Jesus Christ. But it is also in no small part due to his unwavering opposition to the doctrine of analogia entis. He claims that the whole of natural theology is based on this "analogy of being". He accuses the supporters of this concept of attempting to get "a grip on God". Furthermore he says that he opposes analogia entis because " 'being' is a purely philosophical notion not at all concerned with the character of God and the creature."⁵ This of course strikes out not only at the Roman Catholic Church in particular, but also the existentialist philosophical theology of Paul Tillich. Tillich's treatment of analogia entis will take our attention in the latter pages of this chapter. For the present let us turn to Barth's sharpest adversary, Emil Brunner, and his thoughts.

Brunner denies that the analogia entis gives the basis for a construction of a natural theology. "These analogies of the Creation do not legitimately lead sinful man to true theological knowledge..."⁶ He criticises Barth for his use of analogia fidei instead of the analogia entis.

⁵Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁶Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 80.

...the idea of the analogia fidei ought not to have been used, since in classical theology it means something completely different; namely, the demand that obscure passages of scripture are to be expounded according to the ecclesiastical rule of interpretation.⁷

Brunner notes that the analogia entis is a proper concept because of faith, and is not to be thrown out or replaced by faith.

More positively on the analogia entis Brunner holds that the mathematical order of the natural world bears witness to the thought of the Creator, and that the life of man is a reflection of Him who is the true Life. Brunner gives two examples of the importance of the doctrine.

How fundamental it is for all theological statements comes out in the fact that we preserve this element of analogy in two constituent elements of all Biblical Theology: in the idea of the Word, and in that of the Person. The fact that man can speak is similar to the fact that God speaks; the fact that man is a person is an analogy to the Being of God as Person.⁸

This support of analogia entis over against Barth is not without its limitation. Brunner reasserts in his Dogmatics that it does not take into account the fact that the revelation in the creation, which he accepts more forcefully

⁷Ibid.

⁸Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption. Vol. II Dogmatics (Philadelphia:Westminster, 1952) p. 22.

than Barth, is not sufficient to lead sinful man to a true knowledge of the creator.⁹

From this it follows that although Brunner is more positively inclined toward natural theology, he is not committed to the existence of a 'pure' natural theology.

Natural Theology is therefore not, as that medieval doctrine believes, a reliable basis for Christian Theology, but a very contradictory phenomenon, in which both truth and error, divine revelation and human delusions are involved.¹⁰

Acknowledging the ambiguities of Natural Theology, Brunner refuses to discount it completely. "This does not...make Natural Theology a negligible quantity. Though it may not be the basis, it is still a very important part of Christian Theology, especially in the doctrine of man."¹¹ This statement offers a clue to Brunner's view of the non-Christian religions to be considered more specifically in the next chapter. It also emphasizes the non-vicious circular character of Systematic Theology by indicating the importance of a theological anthropology in the discussion of God-to-man and man-to-man relationships.

The strongest position taken by Brunner on the subject of natural theology is an unreserved denial of any connection

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

between natural theology and the Biblical Knowledge of God.¹² This position taken in an earlier work than the Dogmatics may indicate that Brunner has tempered his position in the later work, possibly in opposition to the overwhelming force of Karl Barth's argument which completely negates the concept of natural theology.

Even in this earlier work, however, Brunner is quite emphatic about the importance and the truth of natural revelation or revelation in the creation. He holds that it is essential as a Christian theologian to look "back" to the primal revelation and "forward" to a "revelation of the last days". He says, "We therefore teach a general revelation, or a revelation in the Creation, because Holy Scriptures teach it unmistakably and we intend to teach it in accordance with Scripture..."¹³ Another reason that the general revelation is of importance in Brunner's thought is that he considers it the presupposition of the special revelation in Christ, and he draws the analogy, "just as the revelation in the Old Testament does not compete with that in the New Testament, but is its presupposition."¹⁴

¹²Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 61.

¹³Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 62.

Brunner's anthropological understanding enters the discussion of natural revelation too. Any discussion of natural revelation includes the discussion of man understood as sinful.

Once man has become a sinner, the general revelation is not sufficient to enable him to know the true God. The older theology...is correct in saying that the general revelation exists but that it has no saving significance."¹⁵

Over against Barth who tends to hold the 'unreality' of general revelation because of man's sin, Brunner holds that man can be a sinner only because of the general revelation. The fact that man is a sinner is testimony to the fact that there is a general revelation, revelation in the creation.

Man alone can be a sinner, because only to him does God give Himself to be known through His works; God has created man alone in His image; only in the heart of man does God write his law. Thus the theme of General Revelation or revelation in the creation has not been made unreal by sin; on the contrary, only in the light of the General Revelation can sin be understood."¹⁶

To summarize Brunner's stand in the conflict over general revelation and natural theology we can say that he affirms revelation in the creation. He allows for the possibility of a natural theology, but also asserts that because of man's sin, a natural theology does not give the possibility of a true knowledge of God. Brunner refuses to

¹⁵Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 73.

part with the time honored concept of analogia entis, but holds that it is a possibility only by faith. His view is a more traditional and catholic than that of Barth. It is conditioned by his approach to Systematic Theology just as Barth's view is conditioned by his. But unlike Barth he does not find the general revelation meaningless until the Christ-event. General revelation gives man the opportunity for sin; without general revelation sin is meaningless. This is not to say, however, that the revelation of the Old Covenant is something apart from that of the New Covenant. On the contrary they are part of the same revelation.

Any student of the Barth-Brunner controversy cannot help but feel at times that it gives off more heat than light. The books and articles by each amount to polemic directed against the other. It is with some relief then that we turn to the less turbulent and deeper waters found in the thought of Paul Tillich.

We indicated at the outset of this chapter that Tillich finds his basis for the consideration of General revelation and natural theology in the concept of the logos spermatikos. It is interesting that a modern apologist such as Tillich would find a touchstone with the ancient apologists for whom the logos spermatikos was such a vital point in their

discourse with the philosophers of their time. Justin Martyr will serve as a good example representative of the apologists of ancient Christianity. In his two apologies addressed to his gentile pagan contemporaries he even maintains that the Logos taught the pre-Christian Greek philosophers and that though some of these might be counted as 'godless' (atheoi), they were, insofar as they lived 'according to the Logos', Christians before Christ--Christ being the supreme manifestation of the Logos.

A more modern proponent and apologist who followed Justin's line of reasoning was Nathan Soderblom, Archbishop of Upsala in Sweeden. He in addition to his episcopal duties was one of the great scholars in the field of world religions at the turn of the century, teaching 'comparative religion' as an academic discipline when interest in the non-Christian world was beginning to capture the enthusiasm of the Western academic world. This position as a scholar of non-Christian religions combined with his ecclesiastical position enabled him to speak with some authority about a theology of non-Christian religions. His Gifford lectures in 1931, the year of his death, represent his final effort in this enterprise.¹⁷ Soderblom held that the whole of mankind shares in the inspiration of the Logos whom the

¹⁷Nathan Soderblom, The Living God (Gifford Lectures, 1931).

Christians call Christ the Son of God. He also maintained, along with Temple, that "we are bound to say that there is real revelation outside the Biblical Sphere, or there is no revelation at all, not even in the Bible."¹⁸

There are, however, problems with the logos spermatikos idea in modern times. In the first place, as a general rule we are no longer accustomed to think in neo-platonistic or stoic categories. In the second place, and dependent upon the first observation, there is a real danger that modern man with his materialistic pragmatic world-view can easily make a materialistic pan-theism out of the logos spermatikos. This danger was not as real during the time of Justin, and Soderblom had and Tillich has the philosophical sophistication to avoid this. But the most telling criticism of this comes in the words of Kraemer, "It is and was always used as a general principle for defining an attitude towards non-Christian religions, but never came to grips with them."¹⁹ Whether this criticism will hold for Tillich's treatment remains to be seen.

Some writers prefer to speak in terms of a "cosmic covenant" rather than of "natural theology" or even logos

¹⁸Reported in Al. C. Bouquet, The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions, p. 383.

¹⁹Hendrik Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, op. cit., p. 210.

spermatikos. This has the advantage of Biblical terminology over against philosophic or theological terminology. There are even some Roman Catholic authors among them Jean Danielou who use this terminology. He finds the roots for this 'cosmic covenant' in the stories of Enoch and Noah and affirms that such a covenant denotes a grace-embedded relationship with God which assures a continuing revelation and a response to the revelation by human beings in all times and all places.²⁰ He refers to the persons who respond to the revelation guaranteed in the 'cosmic covenant' as those who belong "invisibly to the visible church". This idea is connected with Tillich's concept of "Spiritual Community".

Tillich's position in the natural theology debate is dependent upon the fact that he takes man more seriously than nature. Also as an existentialist philosopher of religion he is concerned with man's self-understanding and realization of being. This is what he says regarding man and nature:

Man is directly aware of the structures which make cognition possible because he lives in them and acts through them. And if it is true that man incorporates in himself all levels of being, then through such self-knowledge he may at the same time reach onto logical knowledge. On the other hand, the attempt to regard nature as basic, and to derive an interpretation of man from it, is unsatisfactory.²¹

²⁰Reported in Bouquet, op.cit. p. 269. I have been unable to locate the original source but Bouquet cites the date as 1956.

²¹Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology Vol I, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) pp. 138-139.

He exhibits an outlook different from both Brunner and Barth at this point. Again his anthropology enters into the question as does theirs. The difference again arises from the starting point in the particular theological system. Tillich's is "Being Itself" beginning with "God and Being". This is said by way of explanation rather than of criticism.

Tillich is unequivocal in his denial of natural revelation, but in an interesting way. He asserts that although natural revelation per se does not exist, revelation through nature as a special and concrete revelation is a reality. He says this, "Revelation occurs or it does not occur; but it certainly does not occur 'generally'. It is not a structural element of reality."²² The denial of natural or general revelation does not end the discussion of the revelation before Christ--all of which Tillich categorizes as a "special revelation" widely received or universal revelation. The concept of universal revelation--related to logos spermatikos--he sees as necessary to make the final revelation in Christ intelligible. The argument is Biblically and empirically rooted.

Only on the wide basis of universal revelation could the final revelation occur and be received. Without the symbols created by universal revelation the final revelation would not be understandable. Without the religious experiences

²²Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology Vol I, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952) pp. 138-139.

created by universal revelation no categories and forms would exist to receive the final revelation. The Biblical terminology is full of words whose meaning and connotations would be completely strange to listeners and readers if there had been no preceding revelations in Judaism as well as in paganism. Missions could not have reached anyone if there had not been a preparation for the Christian message in universal revelation. The question of the final revelation would not have been asked; therefore, the final answer would not have been received... To assert that a revelation is final revelation without pointing to a history of revelation in which there has been a preparation for it de-humanizes man and demonizes God."²³

This is a turn-about of Karl Barth's position that only in Christ is the general revelation intelligible. Tillich maintains that Christ was intelligible only because of the general revelation. This acknowledges the general truth of the logos spermatikos idea and also appears consonant with the Biblical narrative. For if the general revelation and man's response to it is of minor importance--as it clearly is to Barth--why does it appear in the Bible?

True to his German-protestant tradition Tillich refuses to acknowledge that natural theology can give any answers to the plight of man, and he acknowledges with Brunner the futility of attempting to create a natural theology from the material of the analogia entis. Like Brunner he affirms the value of analogia entis but in a different way.

²³Ibid.

Without such an analogy nothing could be said about God. But the analogia entis is not a method of discovering truth about God; it is the form in which every knowledge of revelation must be expressed.²⁴

He suggests that analogia entis is to be understood as the necessity of man in his finitude to express in terms of finite reality the content of the revelation of the infinite. But he cautions, "The use of finite materials in their ordinary sense for the knowledge of revelation destroys the meaning of revelation and deprives God of his divinity."²⁵ This is the only point at which Tillich enters into the battle over natural revelation and natural theology with any direct participation. For the rest he is content to remain aloof and to dispassionately reach his own conclusions within the confines of his own system. The position taken by Tillich has the merit of being non-polemic as well as having ancient roots in both philosophy and Biblical understanding.

We have taken the time to discuss briefly the conflict surrounding the problems of natural revelation or revelation in the Creation and natural theology. We have looked briefly at the part played in this debate by three contemporary protestant theologians--a debate that is currently

²⁴Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology Vol 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) p. 131.

²⁵Ibid.

raging in theological circles. This has been necessary as a background before considering the view each as a Christian theologian takes of the non-Christian religions. The position chosen by each man in the debate on natural revelation directly pre-disposes their consideration of the world religions.

In the next chapter the three theologians will be discussed under the heading "Thinkers", and two of the men most prominent in modern missionary writing and work, Kraemer and Newbigin will be discussed under the heading "Doers". Criticisms of one upon the other will be offered as well as those of the writer.

CHAPTER IV

THINKERS AND DOERS

The outlook of each "thinker" below and the criticism offered is directly connected to the preceding chapter. Repetition of their arguments about natural theology will be avoided as much as possible here. We are primarily concerned in this chapter with their view as Christian theologians of the non-Christian religions.

It would be convenient to find a "doer" of the thought of each of the theologians. This possibility has not escaped the writer, but the possibility is not open. In the first place, "doers" are not generally bound to the thought of one man. They are concerned with the everyday problems of preaching and witnessing the Gospel. As a result, they are not bound to a system per se as are the "thinkers". The writing of the "doers" shows points of contact with each of the "thinkers" and with each other. Thus it is possible, for example, to link Kraemer with Barth; but it would not be true to the facts. Although it will be shown that Kraemer depends on Barth for a large portion of his thought, he diverges from him significantly enough to be regarded as unique. This is true to a lesser degree between Newbiggin and Brunner.

The thought of Tillich presented in this chapter is in ways a prelude to the next chapter, but his thought is not without influence on both Newbigin and Kraemer.

I. THE THINKERS

Karl Barth

In Mr. Eastman's third category, that all religions are man's striving after God,¹ one man is representative par excellence--Karl Barth. He is bruising in his attack on religion and unsparing even of Christianity as a religion. His thesis is that all religion is unbelief, either in the form of idolatry or of justification by works. He refuses to consider Christianity as the "true religion". He holds that there is no vera religio just as there is no "good man". For him the only decisive criterion of truth and error among the religions of the world is Jesus Christ and it is only by grace that there is any relation at all between the name Jesus Christ and the Christian religion.² Karl Barth's patron saint is without doubt Tertullian.

Where is there any likeness between the disciple of Greece and the disciple of heaven? Away with all proposals for a Stoic, a Platonic, or a Dialectic Christianity! After Jesus Christ, after the Gospel we want no other creed.
(Tertullian: Apol. XLIV; de praescript. haeret. VII)

¹See page 10.

²Reported in Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 189.

Let us remember that Tertullian became numbered with the members of the hyper-orthodox Montanist sect.

In the study of Barth's view of natural revelation in the previous chapter it was clear that he regarded all revelation as originating from God and illuminated only through the event of Christ sent from God. Because of this he views all religion as the attempted replacement of the divine action by a human effort. As Barth sees it this effort is willful and arbitrary and conceives of a god that replaces the God of revelation.

...in religion man ventures to grasp at God. Because it is a grasping, religion is the contradiction of revelation...an attitude which is directly opposed to faith... In religion man bolts and bars himself against revelation by providing a substitute, by taking away in advance the very thing which has to be given by God.³

Against religion Barth posits belief and a 'listening to' the revelation. Religion is not for Barth the response to revelation. Faith is.

Barth is unconcerned with the non-Christian religions thinking them to be an unsuitable subject for a Christian theology. He is, however, concerned with the Christian religion and deeply concerned that it purge itself of 'religionism'. The following citation indicates how in Barth's view that this might happen.

³Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics Vol. I/2, pp. 302-303.

It might begin at the point where in opposition to all 'religionisms' the proclamation of the grace of God is introduced as the truth of the Christian religion. Where Christianity does that--even as one religion with another--its self-consciousness is more than religious fanaticism, its mission is more than religious propaganda, and even in the form of one 'religionism' with others it is more than a 'religionism'. But it will have to be radically different or better; the grace of God will have to be very effective to be essential to Christians as grace, if we are to be able to say that about Christianity.⁴

Criticism of Barth's view. For Barth to hold that the Christian theologian should keep "absolute silence" about the non-Christian religions--be unconcerned with them--is irresponsible and pietistic. It is an irresponsible position because of the existence in our time of a single world civilization. This single world civilization with a single history--this new fact of life--has come about through the impact of Western civilization and is dominated by issues raised within it. This single world civilization is disintegrating the ancient cultures of mankind and sweeping their peoples into the stream of a single world history. This single world civilization is powered by a variety of secularized forms of Christian eschatology. The world is what it is today because of the impact of world affirming Christianity. The Christian cannot 'keep silent' about this

⁴Ibid., p. 298.

fact even if his occupation is writing Systematic Theology. To do so is irresponsible. F. D. Maurice said early in the last century just as the expansion and impact of Western civilization was becoming a reality:

If Englishmen are to abstain rigidly from all contacts with Asians, not even trading with them, then there might be some excuse for ignoring the operation of their minds. But if we are to communicate with them, and in so doing recognize them as being spiritual creatures like ourselves, then it is clearly our duty to understand their point of view.⁵

If we may excuse the noblesse oblige or "white man's burden" motif which the statement brings to mind, the point is still made. We are responsible for the world situation; we cannot ignore it. This means the impact of modern civilization on the non-Christian religions too.

Barth's view is also pietistic. The view that we should as Christians be content to witness to and announce the Gospel and not concern ourselves with the comparison or even the denunciation of the world's religions is a position that pretends to a theological simplicity that does not exist. It is pietistic because it separates Christianity from God's world and our fellow creatures by not allowing that the fact of non-Christian religious existence as a phenomenon to be considered.

⁵Reported in Bouquet, op. cit., p. 342.

Barth's thesis that "religion is unbelief" is directly dependent on his discussion of general revelation which we considered in the previous chapter. But whether true or not within broad limits, there is no room for the deeper question: "Has this whole business of religion anything to do with God, or has God anything to do with it?"⁶

The framework of Barth's theology which determines his position on revelation calls for criticism here. The rejection of analogia entis is vital: (1) God has a certain nature; (2) Man has a certain nature; and (3) Man has no knowledge of God until he reveals Himself in Jesus Christ. But is this framework really Biblical? Is the work of Christ primarily revelatory? Gustav Wingren denies the validity of this framework.

It is exactly this framework which is questionable. "Revelation" stands in the place where "justification" or "forgiveness of sins", i.e., the gospel in the essential meaning of that word, ought to stand. If "justification" stands in the center, it is assumed that man already knows something; yes, that God has already revealed himself through his work in creation (Rom. 1:20), although he has not disclosed his plan of salvation in this creation. Man is driven to do something, but his works do not give him life; he pursues righteousness, but he does not attain to it. He stands there, not without knowledge, but "without excuse", consequently with guilt, just because already as man he had to deal with God and therefore knows how he ought to live."⁷

⁶Asked by Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p.193.

⁷Gustav Wingren, Theology in Conflict, p.29.

What about religion as a "grasping for God"? William Wolf says this: "We can only have had thought about God because God has evoked it. Our thought is not an independent venture that dares to postulate 'God'. Our thought is responsive to his primary self revelation in the depths of consciousness."⁸ Both Wingren and Wolf stand on much firmer Biblical soil than does Barth.

Although Barth unquestionably stands in the tradition of Tertullian, he stands in opposition to the Reformers. For example, John Calvin, as reported by Kraemer:

Calvin states as an unmistakable fact that there is in man a sensus divinitatis... This sensus divinitatis or semen religionis is inextinguishable.⁹

And while Tertullian became hyper orthodox it is worth remembering that St. Clement of Alexandria whose view is congenial to Barth's critics was excised from the martyrologies on the grounds of doubtful orthodoxy.

It may be, indeed, that philosophy was given to the Greeks directly and primarily, until the Lord should call the Greeks. For philosophy was a 'schoolmaster' to bring the Greek minds to Christ, as the Law was brought to the Hebrews...a preparation, paving the way toward perfection in Christ.

(Clement of Alexandria, Strom. 1.V.28)

⁸William Wolf, Man's Knowledge of God, p. 160.

⁹Kraemer, op. cit., p. 169.

Emil Brunner

According to the introduction of his Dogmatics, Brunner as a "thinker" conceives of himself as a "missionary" theologian. In another place, reflecting upon his vocational self appraisal, he finds the primary difference between himself and Barth.

This is probably a matter that distinguishes my thinking from Karl Barth's. Barth thinks as a churchman for the church; I think rather as a missionary...this is the problem of my Man in Revolt, and especially of the two books that followed it, The Divine Human Encounter and Revelation and Reason. But I am aware that I have only begun the task. I shall have to entrust its continuation to the younger generation. The word I leave with them is, 'Missionary Theology'.¹⁰

In the general revelation debate Brunner has been accused of diminishing the Glory of Christ by teaching a general revelation that is communicated to all men, even though he admits that because of sin it is not rightly conceived by all. Brunner responds that there can be no question of diminishing Christ's glory and his defense is closely related to his understanding of the analogia entis.¹¹ He holds that it is the same God "who manifests Himself to us in the works of the Creation, who speaks to us in the incarnation of the Son; in the one case impersonally, and therefore imperfectly,

¹⁰The Christian Century, Vol 66, 1949, p. 816, quoted in H.V. White, "Brunner's Missionary Theology", The Theology of Emil Brunner, Charles W. Kegley, editor. p. 55.

in the other personally, and perfectly."¹²

This view of general revelation leads him to the two-fold thesis that is the background for his understanding of the non-Christian religions.

The religions, the religious life of the natural man, are the product of the original divine revelation and human sin. Apart from real revelation the phenomenon of religion cannot be understood. Even the most primitive polytheistic or pre-polytheistic idolatrous religion is unintelligible without the presupposition of the universal revelation of God which has been given to all men through the Creation. The Holy Scriptures teach us to understand all pagan religion from the standpoint of the revelation through the creation."¹³

The Holy Scriptures to which he refers include St. Paul's interpretation of the pagan religions presented in Romans and described in Acts as derived from the original or general revelation--revelation in the Creation--and as a product of the confused and sinful response to this revelation. The situation described by St. Paul in the first two chapters of Romans suggests to Brunner a 'point of contact' with the other religions. He identifies this 'point of contact' as the conscience. "The point at which the Word of God touches the natural self-consciousness of man is the conscience. Thus the point of contact is the

¹²Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, p. 77.

¹³Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 262.

the sense of guilt and lostness that all men have even though not recognized as such."¹⁴

With this interpretation of St. Paul as a background he criticises the Christian tendency of arrogance in the possession of revelation and by implication takes issue with Barth's thesis. "All religions contain an element of revelation, and no religion has any right to arrogate to itself a monopoly of revelation."¹⁵

In his consideration of general revelation and also in his view of the world religions, Brunner accords a prominent position to the fact of man's sin. "For the Biblical Christian doctrine of the original revelation is only half of the truth; the other half is the doctrine of original sin."¹⁶ The strongest statement of sin in the two-fold exposition of general revelation and original sin is found in his work Revelation and Reason. "The original sin of man breaks out first of all, and mainly, in his religion: the essence of original sin is man's apostasy and his inveterate tendency to be absorbed in himself. All empirical religion...is the 'product' of these two 'factors'."¹⁷ General revelation is the requirement if the "two factors" are to become possibility. In the same work there is a

¹⁴H.V. White, "Brunner's Missionary Theology", The Theology of Emil Brunner, Charles W. Kegley, editor, p. 65.

¹⁵Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 219.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 263.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 264.

statement that nicely summarizes the description of religion and the place of the two fold relationship of revelation and sin in the creation.

In all religion there is a recollection of the divine truth which has been lost; in all there is a longing after the divine Light and the divine Love; but in all religion also there yawns an abyss of daemonic distortion of the truth, and of man's effort to escape from God."¹⁹

Brunner, then, is in agreement with the reformers and particularly Calvin who says that the heathen are never wholly left without any knowledge of God, since God reveals Himself to them--admittedly only in a dim and veiled manner--or at least he has given them a little taste of His truth. (Institutes, I,iii,1.)

Roots for Brunner's point of view go back directly to St. Augustine who conceded the truth within Greek philosophy, because of the general revelation, but also pointed to the error because of human pride.

Some of the philosophers found some great things, so far as they were enabled to do so by God, but they fell into errors as far as they were impeded by their own human nature. Especially because divine providence justly resisted their pride. (De Civitate Dei, Book II)

Criticism of Brunner's view. Because of Brunner's analysis of the non-Christian religions and their relation to the revelation in the creation, he has been accused by

¹⁹Ibid., p. 264.

some as embracing the "fulfillment" theory--the group that holds Christianity to be the fulfillment of man's yearning for the truth. He has in fact said,

Jesus Christ is both the fulfillment of all religion and the judge of all religion. None of them is without the Holy and none of them is the Holy. None is without its impressive truth, and yet none of them is the truth; for their Truth is Jesus Christ.²⁰

This criticism is in some ways unjust because he does not concede or imply that the other religions in any way point to Christ. On the other hand, there is some slight indication that Brunner does conceive of the relation between Christianity and the non-Christian religions in terms of 'fulfillment'. This is seen in his statement that the non-Christians "yearn" for Christ. But Christianity is not necessarily the final point on some kind of theological curve--it is not a point at all but a meeting of God in Christ with the response of repentance and faith. In H. V. White's essay, "Brunner's Missionary Theology", he indicates that Brunner accepts this criticism.²¹ But this is not clear in Brunner's work so far.

The "fulfillment" theory, discussed briefly in Chapter II, also fails to account for the fact that the Christian Gospel has an explosive effect on the non-Christian religions.

²⁰Ibid., p. 265.

²¹White, op. cit., p. 65.

The Christian message destroys whole portions of other religions--the caste system, for example--and completely negates even what are regarded as basic truths within them.

Brunner's analysis is difficult to attack from the Catholic perspective. He stands within the main-stream of Reformation thought and is consistent with the views held by the majority of the church fathers, especially Augustine. It is possible to ask, however, whether this catholic view is, strictly speaking, an adequate position for our time.

Paul Tillich

Tillich's strong negation of natural theology within his affirmation of the logos spermatikos does not mean for him that man in his religion is totally ignorant. Man still possesses his reason which gives him a natural knowledge of the self and the world. Reason also leads the natural man to ask questions about "the ground of being" (and this Tillich sees as the function of so called "natural theology"), but these questions are impossible to answer by reason. The questions are not really questions about revelation, but rather questions about reason's own abyss. His exegesis and interpretation of the Roman Letter shows this clearly.

When Paul speaks of the idolatrous perversion of a potential knowledge of God through nature, he does not challenge the nations because of their questionable arguing but because of their distortion of revelations through nature. Nature

in special sections or nature as a whole can be a medium of revelation in an ecstatic experience. But nature cannot be an argumentative basis for conclusions about the mystery of being. Even if it could be this, it should not be called natural theology.²²

Yet Tillich allows for "ecstasy" or "numinous astonishment" under the aegis of grace. By ecstasy he does not mean emotional excitement, but rather a state in which reason exceeds its normal use.

Tillich calls the ecstatic reason a genuine experience. Tillich says that the ecstatic reason is the subjective side of a situation in which some event occurs which evokes it, and which can be called a "sign event". Revelation is the occurrence of this whole situation. By relating revelation to ecstatic reason, Tillich can speak of it in terms which do not demand a distinction of natural and supernatural. The vehicle of revelation is an experience, but it is an experience which has become charged with a sense of the depth and mystery of existence. The "sign event" is in a sense empirical, but the ecstatic reason finds a particular significance in it, because it is linked up somehow with our ultimate concern. Revelation consists in the whole constellation of sign events as grasped by ecstatic reason, conveying a sense of ultimate concern.²³

Tillich allows for this happening outside Christianity. He says that every religion is the receptive answer to such revelatory experiences.

²²Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology Vol I, p. 120.

²³Dorothy M. Emmet, "Epistemology and the Idea of Revelation", The Theology of Paul Tillich, Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, editors. pp. 211-212.

Every religion is the receptive answer to revelatory experiences. This is its greatness and its dignity; this makes religion and its expressions holy in theoria as well as in praxis. This holiness is not their cognitive or even religious quality, but their power of pointing beyond themselves.²⁴

Allowing every religion to be the receiver of revelation does not mean that any religion is itself revealed, even Christianity. As a philosopher he notes that the theologians reject applying the term 'religion' to Christianity. Tillich, however, is not prepared to accept Barth's categorical statement "Religion is unbelief." He acknowledges only that this is a correct description of what he calls "demonized religion". Tillich notes that "every religion is based on revelation, and that every revelation expresses itself in a religion."²⁵ Tillich continues,

In so far as religion is based on revelation it is unambiguous; in so far as it receives revelation it is ambiguous. This is true of all religions, even those which their followers call revealed religion. But no religion is revealed.²⁶

This presumably includes Christianity.

Because of this relationship between revelation and religious community Tillich finds a need for two terms: "Spiritual Presence" and "Spiritual Community".

²⁴Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology Vol III, p. 99.

²⁵Ibid., p. 104.

²⁶Ibid.

By Spiritual Presence Tillich means the presence of God. He holds that man is never left alone; God is present in His creation.

Since mankind is never left alone by God, since it is continuously under the impact of the Spiritual Presence, there is always a New Being in history. There is always participation in the transcendent union of unambiguous life. However, it is fragmentary in its manifestation in time and space. The fulfilled transcendent union is an eschatological concept. The fragment is an anticipation (as Paul speaks of the fragmentary and anticipatory possession of the divine Spirit, of the truth, of the vision of God, and so on).²⁷

The only full, non-fragmentary, unambiguous manifestation of the Spiritual Presence occurred in Jesus Christ. "In him," Tillich says, "the New Being appeared as the criterion of all Spiritual Presences in past and future..."²⁸

Tillich attacks those who espouse what he calls a "theology of experience", because they negate any ultimate unambiguous manifestation of the Spiritual Presence. Tillich then is a Christian in his own terms (and not on his own terms).

To them progressive religious experience, perhaps in terms of an amalgamation of the world religions, will go qualitatively beyond Jesus as the Christ--and not only quantitatively as the Fourth Gospel acknowledges. Obviously, such an expectation's realization would destroy the Christ character of Jesus. More than one manifestation of the Spiritual Presence claiming ultimacy

²⁷Ibid., p. 140.

²⁸Ibid., p. 144.

would deny the very concept of ultimacy; they would instead, permeate the demonic split of consciousness.²⁹

Specifically he means the Eastern and Western Symmachus' and "essence" theorizers.³⁰

In addition to the Spiritual Presence in the Christ, Tillich affirms the Spiritual Presence in history and identifies it with the Spiritual Presence in Christ. He also defines what he means by the Spiritual Presence before Christ.

The general assertion was that the Spiritual Presence in history is essentially the same as the Spiritual Presence in Jesus as the Christ. God in his self-manifestation, wherever this occurs, is the same God who is decisively and ultimately manifest in the Christ. Therefore, his manifestations anywhere before or after Christ must be consonant with the encounter with the center of history. 'Before' Christ means before an existential encounter with the New Being in him."³¹

The identification of the Spiritual Presence in history leads him to the second concept: Spiritual Community. As Tillich understands the term, Spiritual Community exists both inside and outside the Christian faith.

The term 'Spiritual Community' has been used to characterize sharply that element in the concept of the Church which is called the 'body of Christ' by the New Testament and the 'church invisible or Spiritual' by the Reformation. In

²⁹Ibid., p. 148.

³⁰See page 12.

³¹Tillich, Systematic Theology Vol III, p. 147.

previous discussion this element has sometimes been called the 'invisible essence of the religious communities.' Such a statement implies that the Spiritual Community is not a group existing beside other groups but rather a power and a structure inherent and effective in such groups, that is, in religious communities."³²

This Spiritual Presence in the Spiritual Community may be active or latent. Tillich views the non-Christian religions as possible Spiritual Communities with either latent or occasionally active Spiritual Presence.

This means that the Spiritual Community is a universal, truly catholic phenomenon. Tillich finds such a universalistic spirit in early Christianity. He is careful to note that the ultimate criterion of this catholic spirit was Christ.

This astonishing universalism, however, was always balanced by a criterion which was never questioned: the image of Jesus as the Christ, as documented in the New and prepared for in the Old Testament. Christian universalism was not syncretistic; it did not mix, but rather subjected whatever it received to an ultimate criterion."³³

He holds that in one sense primitive Christianity was not a religion but the announcement of man's condition and God's remedy. The first two chapters of Romans are the basis for this assertion. He says about Paul's argument

³²Ibid., p. 162.

³³Paul Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions, p. 36.

With respect to other religions he makes the assertion, unheard of for a Jew, that Jews and pagans are equally under the bondage of sin and equally in need of salvation--a salvation which comes not from a new religion, the Christian, but from an event in history.³⁴

With the concept of Spiritual Community in mind and his report of the Spiritual Community in primitive Christianity, Tillich is able to make a statement of how Christians ought to view non-Christians and the non-Christian religions.

It is most important for the practice of the Christian ministry, especially in its missionary activities toward those both within and without the Christian culture, to consider pagans, humanists, and Jews as members of the latent Spiritual Community and not as complete strangers who are invited into the Spiritual Community from outside.³⁵

He sees the concepts of Spiritual Presence and Spiritual Community as antidotes for arrogating superiority to the Christian religion per se.

For Tillich Christianity cannot be based on a simple negation of the non-Christian religions which it encounters. He says, "The relation is profoundly dialectical, and that is not a weakness, but a greatness of Christianity, especially in its self-critical protestant form."³⁶

Christianity provides the answers to the religious questions of man only as long as it breaks through its own

³⁴Ibid., p. 33.

³⁵Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol III, p. 155.

³⁶Paul Tillich, Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions, p. 51.

particularity. The Spiritual Presence is active in the Christian portion of the Spiritual Community when Christianity negates itself and points to the New Being in Christ.

Criticism of Tillich's view. Tillich exhibits at times both contact and conflict with Barth and Brunner. His affirmation of the Spiritual Presence in Christ is consonant with a Spirit Christology. But the Spiritual Presence in Christ seen in connection with a Spiritual Presence in history and a Spiritual Community tends to detach a "Christ concept" from the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. When this is done we stand--from the Biblical perspective--in unbelief. Before the coming of Jesus, the word Christ was a detached concept, filled with contradicting speculations, (e.g., the Christ as King; the Christ as servant), that easily fitted into its plastic mold. The synoptic gospels show that the man Jesus faced all manner of opposition when he attempted to put his content into the Christ-mold. The Biblical-Christian perspective contends that he succeeded and thereby defined the Christ in such a way that it cannot be discussed except in his terms. The Christian faith is that Jesus is the Christ and it is belief in Jesus as the Christ. The danger in Tillich is the Christian philosopher's peril that he will no longer remain in the Christian faith thus defined.

As a philosopher with roots deep in the logos spermatikos

idea, which he holds is the meeting point between philosophy and theology, he maintains a high place for the function of reason. There is some question in the light of Biblical epistemology about according reason so high a place. In the bible the heart is considered the central spot in the anthropological response.

The philosophical intellectualist approach has the advantage of casting our thoughts in different form from those employed by Barth and Brunner. The problem is not on the intellectual level primarily, however, but on the practical. Some despair at finding practical application for the ponderous and massive thought of Tillich. In another connection David E. Roberts of Union Seminary has commented on this difficulty with Tillich who allegedly acknowledges the problem.

It is a wierd experience...to have problems answering with great sensitivity and patience, by being brought into connection with some relevant segment of the system, only to discover later that I do not happen to be the man who carries this system around in his head.³⁷

This same difficulty will be observed when we discuss Tillich's own application of his system in the next chapter, under "Dialogue as an approach to the non-Christian religions."

³⁷Roberts, op. cit., p. 130.

II. THE DOERS

The question of practicability raised about Tillich's thought can appropriately be raised with every systematic theologian. It is important, then, to turn to men of learning who are more easily categorized as "doers" than "thinkers"--the men who have 'gone out into all the world' on a practical work-a-day level and have reflected extensively upon it. Once again we lament that our consideration of the "thinkers" would be considerably augmented if we could find for each a "doer" of the "thinker's" thought. This is not possible because as we have remarked previously the pragmatic "doing" is not logically bound as is the systematic thought of the theologian. Thus while Kraemer shows great affinity to the thought of Barth, his advocated method departs significantly at points from the viewpoint of the renowned Basel Mozart devotee. The "doing" of Kraemer and Newbigin also touches upon the approaches considered in the next chapter.

Hendrik Kraemer

The writing of Hendrik Kraemer in the field of mission spans almost half a century. If the possible approaches of Christianity to the non-Christian religions can be considered a spectrum, he has changed position on this spectrum to some noticable degree, but for the most part has remained within the continental protestant reformation tradition. An example

of his 'movement' can be cited in his most recent work, written in 1960. In World Cultures and World Religions he casts a favorable eye on the program and philosophy of Paul Tillich. He says, "Christian thinking in the coming dialogue will probably have to restate its relation to the philosophy of being..."³⁸ This is precisely Tillich's program. Yet he is not without his self-conscious Barthian outlook. This is especially evident in his discussion of the importance of a theological anthropology. He says that anthropology or the theological understanding of man will be a crucial issue in the future. "Karl Barth's anthropology in his Church Dogmatics may contain fruitful material...on this point."³⁹

Another connection with Barth is observed in his discussion of man's reason.

To bring under 'General Revelation' those concepts and insights which man can reach by his own powers (reason, observation) as the phrase runs, is a false rubrication, because, as we have said repeatedly, if words have meaning then 'revelation' means per definitionem a purely divine initiative and act.⁴⁰

This position places him over against Brunner who holds that

³⁸Hendrik Kraemer, World Cultures and World Religions, p. 374.

³⁹Ibid., p. 363.

⁴⁰Hendrik Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 343.

revelation and reason are two sides of the same coin. Kraemer holds with Barth that natural theology is error. He conceives natural theology as requiring that the Gospel be the fulfillment of man's yearning and he cannot accept the "fulfillment" theory.

Natural theology---which conceives of the Gospel as essentially the fulfillment, the highest development and budding forth of the religious forces and seeds in mankind, overlooks...the sui generis character of the revelation of Christ.⁴¹

The sui generis character of revelation in Christ is the starting point of Barth's dogmatics. This definition of Natural Theology is from the catholic view incorrect because it limits its consideration to man's reason only. As prominent a position as reason is accorded in natural theology, even St. Thomas Aquinas did not define it so narrowly.

Like Barth too, he is concerned with the announcement of Christ--the "pointing to Christ" as the vocation of Christianity especially in its contact with the non-Christian religions. He holds with Barth that the Christian religion as such is not that "we have the revelation and not you," but rather to point gratefully and humbly to Christ saying, "God has revealed himself fully in Christ; believe and adore."⁴²

⁴¹Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a non-Christian World, p. 123.

⁴²Ibid., p. 119.

His connection with Barth is strongest in his earlier work, The Christian Message in a non-Christian World, published in 1938. Kraemer himself describes the thesis of the book as a Christological interpretation of history and he is in that book self-consciously Barthian. He became less so as his writing has progressed since that time. Even though he is tied and committed to the continental theologies, he does show a certain openness to whatever "gets the job done" regardless of the theological origin.

This means that unlike Barth he does not ignore the fact of non-Christian religions. Indeed he demands, even in his early writings, that we have a thorough knowledge of them. He says, for example,

The evangelistic approach means to have constantly in mind that a missionary is a living human being among other living human beings, whose minds are soaked in the atmosphere of their own religions. This being so, it goes without saying that it is impossible and not permissible to approach them without a thorough knowledge of their religions and general human background.⁴³

In later works the differences between he and Barth are even more clearly spelled out. "If Barth says--and he does--that the Bible knows no other mode of revelation than Christ, he has the Bible against him."⁴⁴

⁴³Ibid., p. 303.

⁴⁴Hendrik Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 358.

In this same book Kraemer's connection with Brunner is demonstrated in his treatment of conscience.

Even in its most degraded form religion is evidence that man is haunted by God. The religious consciousness of man, is, unwittingly, man's bad conscience in relation to Him, knowing Him and yet refusing to know Him.⁴⁵

Kraemer's interpretation drawn from his practical experience is quite similar to Brunner's theoretical expression which sees the conscience of a "point of contact" between the Christian and the non-Christian.

But even in this latter point Kraemer parts company with Brunner. Kraemer, although advocating the study and thorough knowledge of non-Christian religions, cites the futility of trying to find "points of contact". Religions are not series of principles or dogmas that can be taken as items independently of the total religious life. He refuses to arbitrarily compare concepts between religions--to find some kind of common ground on which they can meet. Kraemer states that the true point of contact is in the missionary himself. He sees this manifest as "having an untiring and genuine interest in the religion, ideas, sentiments and institutions" of the people among whom the missionary works, "for Christ's sake and for the sake of the people."⁴⁶ In

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 309.

⁴⁶Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a non-Christian World, pp. 135-140.

this view he stands close, perhaps on the threshold, of the view held by Tillich in his concept of dialogue to be discussed in the next chapter.

Another connection with Tillich's dialogue method is his insistence on the necessity for being "true" to each other rather than merely "as sweet as possible with each other" in the encounter with the world's religions.⁴⁷ The attitude of truth underlies his anti-syncretistic polemic which he has elucidated in Barthian terms.

Kraemer implies criticism of Christianity when he raises the question of relating either Christianity or the Gospel to the non-Christian religions. He does not admit "religion as unbelief" as does Barth, but he does acknowledge that Christianity manifests some of the same sublime and base characteristics that many of the non-Christian religions do. This has an affinity to what Tillich calls the demonic in Religion.

Kraemer feels that the problem is not one of relating the Christian faith to the non-Christian religions, but rather that of communicating the faith to the people. Therefore he says,

⁴⁷Hendrik Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 134.

The real programme is not to relate the thought of Christianity to the thought of India or China or another civilization, but to express it through these different heretages, and then see whether this in various cases may be called relating or not.⁴⁸

Hendrik Kraemer uses freely from all the theologians as he goes about doing his work. He provides the "thinkers" with experience and an analysis of that experience which serves as a practical basis for their thought. In addition to "doing" he has done a good bit of "thinking" himself.

Leslie Newbigin

Of the two men, Newbigin and Kraemer, Hendrik Kraemer has done more writing in this area than has Leslie Newbigin. Some might argue that Kraemer has also done more "doing". But Newbigin's contributions both in "doing" and writing are not inconsiderable especially in recent years.

Newbigin shows affinity at times with the thought of Barth and Kraemer, but he is in no sense bound to either. He has been thoroughly conditioned by his special experience in India, and also uses freely of the thought that works best in that situation.

His simplest statements seem the most Barthian.

The Christian missionary has nothing to do but to bring men face to face with Jesus Christ, the total fact of Jesus. Now to say this is, of

⁴⁸Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a non-Christian World, p. 328.

course, to say that Jesus is himself the ultimate authority for mankind, an authority not requiring to be ratified by any other. And that is, in fact, the Christian claim.⁴⁹

Yet, he is not unprepared to depart from him at times along the same lines as Kraemer. This departure is seen in statements about the "point of contact". "The real point of contact between Christian and non-Christian," he says, "is not in the religion of the non-Christian but in his humanity."⁵⁰ He also differs with Brunner here on the same ground as did Kraemer. The fact the both "doers" differ from the two continental "thinkers" and show affinity to Tillich at this point is a strong argument for the validity of the kinds of approaches outlined in the next chapter.

The focus of Newbigin's writing in this area--determined directly by his experience in the Church of South India--is an expression of the necessity for a unity of Christian witness. He sees this as all important if the Gospel is to interpret the universal secular history which all men share.

The Church must become recognizable as a family, in which, in principle, all men of every kind are at home. The necessary implication of a universal gospel is a universal fellowship, and the fact that we now share a universal secular history makes it impossible for us any longer to evade that implication.⁵¹

⁴⁹J.E.L. Newbigin, A Faith for This One World, p. 57.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 65.

⁵¹Leslie Newbigin, "World Christianity", in Christianity and World Revolution, Edwin H. Rian, editor, p. 155.

Newbigin sees the Church called, as Israel was elected, to be a witness to God and Christ. This is the authority with which the church is invested over against the other religions.

Therefore, we must state...that the duty and authority of the Church to preach the Gospel to all nations rests upon the fact that God has chosen it for this purpose, to be the witness, the first fruits and the instrument of his saving deeds.⁵²

Like all the theologians considered, Newbigin is categorically against syncretism in its Western or Eastern expression. Again, because of his Indian experience he is quite articulate in his criticism of the Eastern syncretistic solution to the question of religious pluralism. The analysis of the Hindu offer to serve as an agent of reconciliation between the religions which appeared in the Journal of Religion is quite persuasive on this issue. He shows that far from providing a truce in the conflict it is diametrically opposed to any religion claiming a historic basis of revelation.⁵³

Newbigin sees the demand for spread of technology, a product of Christian Western civilization, as offering an unprecedented opportunity for Christian mission. Technology, although considered un-ideological, in fact runs counter to

⁵²Leslie Newbigin, A Faith for This One World, p. 81.

⁵³Leslie Newbigin, "The Quest for Unity Through Religion" Journal of Religion, Vol 35., p. 23.

the world view of the religions in India. He notes, however, that the non-Christian religions seem to have less difficulty in absorbing the modern scientific idea than Christianity has had. He therefore pleads that Christianity come to terms with its offspring so that it may provide the answers to the questions raised by the technological presence in the non-Western world, and to which the non-Christian religions are unable to give adequate answers.

The disadvantage of this analysis is that the so-called Christian "heresies" of secular materialism such as communism and even Islam to a degree, are able to give an intelligible rationale for the technological presence. So this program does not provide an adequate relationship to these kinds of religions and quasi-religions. It does, however, meet the test of relevancy. It serves to answer the questions that the non-Christian, non-Western world is answering.

Newbigin is more concerned with the faults of Christianity than with its relationship to the non-Christian religions. We are all thankful for his insights and suggestions, all of which merit serious attention because of their critical assessment of Christianity's own house. In the long run, however, this seems to be begging the question. Any approach to the non-Christian religions found in Newbigin

is found to be cast along the familiar traditional continental theological lines.

Although both Newbigin and Kraemer are bold and pragmatic at times their roots seem firmly planted in the neo-Reformation theology of continental Europe. Are these really effective in our un-traditional times? In the next chapter we will consider an approach that relies less on the continental neo-orthodox theology and which takes human value more seriously.

V. THE NON-TRADITIONAL APPROACH

What I have chosen to call "the non-traditional approach" is really a general covering for three proposed approaches by the Christian to the non-Christian. The three programs to be considered are: (1) indigenisation; (2) dialogue; and (3) Christian presence. The common ground that each share is that they all take man and his religious expression seriously. They are listed in the order above because this order roughly follows the chronology in which they appeared. All of them are under current discussion as serious approaches in the present world situation.

I. INDIGENISATION

This approach was one of the responses to the liberal atmosphere at the 1928 Jerusalem Conference of the International Missionary Council. The program is deceptively simple: Preach the Gospel and allow the response to take the form it takes naturally. Allow the response to arise from the hearers without imposing the traditional Western shape of liturgical worship, music, architecture, etc.

Proponents of this approach find authority in Pope Gregory's instructions to St. Augustine of Canterbury as he prepared to undertake the mission to the British Isles. In this instruction the Pope encouraged Augustine to allow the

temples and places of pagan worship which he found to continue to function. They were not to be destroyed, but a new content--the Christian content--was to be put into them. They were to be "baptized".

An overwhelming concern of the proponents of this approach to the non-Christian is that of communication. A. C. Bouquet, one of the principle writers in this field, said this in a recent book, "The thesis of this book may be summed up in a single phrase: 'Not a new religion, but a newly expressed Christianity.'"¹ The new expression that the supporters of this method seek and advocate is to be found in the existing expression of the peoples addressed with the Gospel. All point to the need of "translation" and changing the "iron mold of expression". Ninian Smart in an Essay appearing in the recently published Soundings makes this statement.

We must increasingly ponder the problems of translation. Not of course literally, for that's been done often enough, but more in the way in which St. Augustine and Aquinas translated Christian thoughts into the terminology of the Greek philosophers. For Christianity to be really intelligible to those brought up in other cultures, the concepts of the non-Christian religions must be adapted for the purpose."²

¹A. C. Bouquet, The Christian Faith and non-Christian Religions, p. 118.

²Ninian Smart, "The Relation Between Christianity and the Other Great Religions" in Soundings, Alec Vidler, editor. p. 121.

Making the same point but from a slightly different angle another writer stresses the "living" nature of the Gospel and, hopefully the Christian faith.

The Gospel cannot be communicated in some iron mold given by the past. It is a living process, and it can be effectively carried out only in terms of the life, thought, and experience of the people to whom it is directed.³

The reason, then, behind the indigenous approach is intelligibility and the "baptism" of existing expression of the natural man's religious response.

The general principles of this approach are set forth at length by Bouquet.³ I shall attempt to briefly summarize them. In the first place it presupposes that the various religions and religious responses are related through the principle of the Divine Logos. Secondly, the supporters of this approach propose to discard (presumably to impose this discard) any really sub-Christian elements existing in the religious consciousness of the non-Christian. Finally, they allow that some of the elements, perhaps the pre-Christian literature, be retained for its cultural and educational value to show how earnest seekers had in the past expressed what they thought about God.

³David G. Moses, "Christianity and the non-Christian Religions" in International Review of Missions, April, 1954, p. 150.

⁴Bouquet, op. cit., pp. 418 ff.

There are some strong points to this approach. It has affinities with some of the practices of the primitive church. The Rt. Rev. F. J. McConell calling attention to this primitive universality says, "Everything of the true and good and the beautiful will get a better chance to show truth and goodness and beauty after it has been converted to Christianity than it ever has before."⁵ Presumably this means that the expressions of the religious responses that arise from the non-Christian will be richer and more appreciated than they were formerly as non-Christian phenomena. The argument for the creativeness of the Gospel is strongly supported by this approach to the non-Christian. Since advance in knowledge and insight are of the Gospel's essence it is held that Christianity cannot be a final religion unless it is a growing religion prepared to enrich itself with the new faith and direction provided by indigenous Christianity in churches that emerge in the future.

But there are also many drawbacks to this program. Western Christians are usually not content merely to preach and allow the free operation of the Holy Spirit, as is advocated here. Indeed, each of the supporters has listed certain items within a culture or natural religious response

⁵Quoted in H. F. Rall, "The Finality of the Christian Religion" in Contemporary Thinking About Jesus, Thomas Kepler, editor. p. 239.

that can in no case be tolerated. Such a list is the one prepared by Bishop Lucas of Masasi.⁶ Bouquet is constantly concerned about a proper "balance". He writes, "The balance between Catholicity and ecumenicity on the one hand, and a reasonable nationalism or particularity on the other, is always a delicate balance."⁷ This self consciousness about balance and what may or may not be included in an indigenous response to the Gospel is contrary, or so it would seem, to the ideal sought by adopting the indigenisation approach. Yet, the supporters all find themselves making these qualifications. About this Dr. Wolf cautions,

The Church ought not to pretend to know in advance what cultural items must be discarded. It is for the native Christian to begin the painful transformation of his religious inheritance, not for the missionary who is constantly tempted to confuse Western Culture with the Gospel.⁸

Is it possible to allow this cultural transformation which the Gospel brings and still retain the cultural expression of the non-Christian so desired by the advocates of indigenisation? The experience of Hendrik Kraemer on the island of Bali suggests that it is not.⁹ Kraemer was desirous of conserving the harmonious and beautiful

⁶Bouquet, op. cit., pp. 218-222. ⁷Ibid., p. 216.

⁸William J. Wolf, Man's Knowledge of God, p. 178.

⁹Reported in Bouquet, op. cit., p. 366.

elements of native culture. The opposition to this came from the Balinese themselves. When they became Christians they ceased to be interested in preserving any of their artistic pagentry, even by adopting it to the service of the new faith.

Experiences like that of Kraemer show that the supporters of indigenisation are victims of the "culture fallacy". They do not take seriously enough the axiom that religion produces the culture--the culture being a response to the religion. This means that a new religion will produce a new culture and not merely adapt the old to its use. The essential question for Christianity in non-Christian cultures is not how to make Christianity indigenous, but rather how Christians in non-Christian cultures can become rooted in the soil.

II. DIALOGUE

This is the program that has the wholehearted support of Paul Tillich in his book, Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions.

The task underlying this approach is communication, just as it was behind indigenisation. Bouquet discusses the problem of communication in connection with the dialogue approach.

It seems quite certain that educated Buddhists and instructed Christians repeatedly misunderstand one another, because they do not know the

basic meaning of the terms which each side is using.¹⁰

The program of dialogue intends to clear up these problems of definition.

Paul Tillich insists there be four presuppositions to fruitful dialogue between religions. First, both partners in the dialogue must acknowledge the value of the other's religious conviction. Second, each person in the dialogue should be able to represent his own religious basis with conviction. Third, there must be a common ground between the participants which makes both dialogue and conflict possible. Fourth, and finally, there must be an openness of both sides to criticism directed against their own religious basis.

Stephen Neill identifies several regions within Christianity to which questions and criticisms may be directed.¹¹ One of these criticisms concerns the Christian claim of universality. There is serious doubt in some quarters that Christianity dares to take the risk of universality because of the Western hegemony manifest within it today. Another criticism concerns the alleged fellowship and community which should be the natural result of the principles professed by Christianity. There is some reason to suspect

¹⁰Bouquet, op. cit., p. 299.

¹¹Stephen Neill, Christian Faith and Other Faiths, pp. 222 ff.

that Christianity has less of this than some of the famous army regiments in British history. Although Christianity seems to be self-critical on the above two points, our partners in the proposed dialogue approach may be expected to ask whether we are absolutely honest in these self criticisms. The last of the areas indicated by Neill concerns Christianity's willingness to accept new truth wherever it is found. This has never been a strength of Christianity in practice, no matter how liberally theorized. Historically, for example, the church's reception of Galileo's discoveries does not speak well for us. How much more likely the non-Christian is to doubt our sincerity as we consider his position, which he regards as embracing the truth.

These areas must be earnestly explored within Christianity and answers to the questions that will arise thoroughly thought out before a true dialogue will be fruitful.

One of the distinct advantages of dialogue is that it puts both partners on equal footing. We have considered it as an approach of the Christian to the non-Christian, but it is equally a possible approach of the non-Christian to the Christian. This has the advantage of removing any latent feelings of either superiority or patronism on the part of Christianity. It also offers a real challenge to the holders of the Symmachus view to abandon their mountain of perfection

and meet with Christianity in the valley of dialogue where both mountains are in view, but neither offers advantage.

There are two drawbacks to the dialogue method that must be mentioned. Both concern the practicability of it as a program. Hendrik Kraemer suggests one from his particular point of view.

In the dialogue with the religion and the religions a too great leaning towards systasis (harmonizing, synthesis), or of distasis (keeping a distance) which excludes real dialogue and communication, are both contrary to the intrinsic dialectical character of the Christian faith.¹²

The latter, distasis, would seem to be the more usual practice within the Church. One of the first men to attempt to enter into dialogue with the non-Christians in the sense and under the preconditions laid down by Tillich was Origen, and he was condemned as an heretic.

A second drawback is that the process of dialogue is an intellectual approach, suitable to the philosopher of religion and perhaps the theologian, but impossible for the ordinary man to enter into fruitfully. It requires knowledge and commitment, but a Christian may be firm in the faith and yet not sufficiently learned about his own or his partner's view.

¹²Hendrik Kraemer, Religion and the Christian Faith, p. 322.

III. CHRISTIAN PRESENCE

The approach called Christian Presence offers many of the advantages that the first two of the non-traditional approaches held, and avoids the disadvantages discovered within those other positions. This program is a newcomer to the modern mission picture and is espoused thus far principally by Anglicans, such as Max Warren and Kenneth Craig. It is the approach advocated by The Christian Presence Series, the first volume of which appeared in 1959.

It is something of a misunderstanding to refer to this approach as a program. In a series of lectures delivered at the College of Preachers in Washington, D.C., in 1958 Max Warren made this statement, "to be...is a prior obligation before considering what to do. Only by 'being present' in this truly supernatural way can one really meet the needs of other people."¹³ He felt the need to make this statement because of the natural tendency on the part of the Westerner, particularly the American, to begin with a program--a plan of action. This method has no plan other than to be present as a Christian among the non-Christian. It is a state of being present rather than movement. We are not so much going to people as much as being with them, being available,

¹³Max Warren, Challenge and Response, p. 73.

being part of the background, something at once familiar and utterly reliable, one fixed point in our contemporary world of flux and uncertainty.

Although new as a proposed strategy of modern missions, it is not really anything new theologically speaking. It has its roots in the New Testament and in the freedom which is ours in Christ. Speaking of this freedom Stephen Neill refers to its peculiar nature.

In Jesus we see what a free man looks like. We could hardly have guessed in advance that this is what the picture would be. The first paradox in this freedom is that it means complete acceptance of a situation as it is given without a man's own choice. The second paradox is that this freedom can be lived out only in a state of total dependence upon God. These elements in the life of Jesus are made plain in all the Gospels.¹⁴

We are to 'be present' in a situation totally dependent upon God so that other people may meet Christ through us.

There are some historical precedents for this approach as well, from both the Catholic and Reformation traditions. At the time of the early church, the pagans are reported to have marveled, "See how they love one another." This is said to have attracted many to Christianity within the chaotic and often insecure society of the later Roman Empire. This was the approach of the bands of artisans and craftsmen that were sent out in 7th century Britain as evangelists. This

¹⁴Neill, op. cit., p. 10.

approach also has roots in the work of the mendicant friars, particularly the Franciscans, and particularly in the person of St. Francis. The Moravians too practiced this approach to the non-Christians. Charles de Faucauld and the Little Brothers of Jesus were advocates of this way of being present. It is reported that no less a person than the Cardinal Archbishop of Algiers, in the middle of the nineteenth century who, when passing a mosque, always alighted from his carriage to walk past in bare feet. John Oman said, "There is only one way of persuading, and that is to be present in such a way that nothing will prevent the Gospel from being seen, except the desire to remain in darkness."¹⁵ In more modern times, even Paul Tillich in his own terms speaks of the response that comes as a result of being present, and of the centrality of the participation rather than the centrality of creed, teaching, or dogma.

If someone desires to participate in the community of love in a particular church, then he may become a full member by accepting the creed and the order of that church; or he may remain in a particular church and become a fully accepted guest in another church; or he may remain in the latency of the Spiritual Community as a Jew, Mohammedan, humanist, mystic, and so on, who wants to be received into the community of love because he is aware of his own essential belonging to the Spiritual Community. In the last case, he would also be a guest, or more precisely, a visitor

¹⁵Reported in Bouquet, op. cit., p. 386.

or friend. What is decisive, at least in the Protestant sphere, is the desire to participate in a group whose foundation is the acceptance of Jesus as the Christ; this desire takes the place of credal statement and, in spite of the absence of conversion, opens the door into the community of love without reservation on the side of the church.¹⁶

This view of the non-Christian religions presupposes the validity of general revelation and the free action of the Holy Spirit.

An example of the "being present" approach are the highly successful "Woodbrooke Tracts" by Loofty Levonian circulated among the Muslims in Turkey. F. F. Goodsell, in an article appearing in 1954 discusses the policies and principles observed in the preparation of these tracts.¹⁷

1. No direct attack or criticism of the Muslim faith is made.

2. The tracts are definitely and positively Christian. They are not philosophical or ethical treatises, but in every one the emphasis is on Jesus and his teaching.

3. The tracts each deal with a specific problem which has come up in the context of Muslim life in Turkey. There are two parts to the treatment of each problem. First, the

¹⁶Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol III, p. 181.

¹⁷F. F. Goodsell, "A New Venture in Faith Communicating the Gospel to Muslims", International Review of Missions, April, 1954, p. 166 ff.

problem is presented and explained, and then the Christian answer to the problem is stated in terms of Jesus in the Gospels.

4. The tracts were always written with the mental habits and beliefs of Muslims in mind, particularly those which prevented the Muslim from understanding the Christian view. A change in perspective was the goal, not attack on the Muslim faith.

5. The problems that were considered by the tracts were taken from the classical Turkish authors, and the Turkish and Moslem religious press. This had the distinct advantage of dealing with subjects that were on the minds of the Turks and not those which the Christians thought the Turks should be concerned with.

Such is the effort of one man along the lines of Christian Presence. The words of Mark 13 are appropriate to such a man. "It is not you who speak but the Holy Spirit."

One of the advantages of this approach is that it can be carried out by any Christian wherever he is. It requires no special training, no clericalism--only commitment. Today there are Christian laymen present in all parts of the world. The impact of Western civilization on the modern picture has carried technicians, teachers, and businessmen into the far corners of the earth. There is an opportunity for a

Christian to witness to the Gospel whether he is in the Peace Corps in Nigeria, or with Ford International at Bombay. The men have already been sent out, and they witness either for or against Christ whether or not they consciously realize it. This missionary approach is a part of the much touted ministry of the laity. It is worth remembering that Monasticism from its start was a lay movement, and did its most effective witness when this was the primary focus.

This approach requires commitment to the Christian faith on the part of the participant, and it requires an inner confidence that only this commitment to the Christian faith can inspire. The humility and willingness to listen required in this approach is a product of this inner confidence. Stephen Neill captures in a few phrases the conditions of humility inspired by the inner confidence of the committed Christian.

If the Christian has really trusted in Christ, he can open himself to any wind that blows from any quarter of the heavens. If by chance some of those winds should blow him unexpected treasures, he will be convinced that Christ's storehouses are wide enough to gather in those treasures too, in order that in the last day nothing may be lost.¹⁸

The danger in this approach is that of misinterpretation by the Symmachus men East and West. Slater, for example,

¹⁸Neill, op. cit., p. 18.

uses Neill specifically in support of his approach.¹⁹ The problem of being misunderstood should not deter the man who seeks to be present as a Christian within a non-Christian community. To sit where the non-Christian sits does not mean to think what he thinks. But it is a grass roots approach that takes the non-Christian seriously without imposing a particular theological viewpoint or a particular response to the Gospel. It partakes of the freedom expressed by Jesus in the gospels. It allows the Holy Spirit to operate as we have been promised he will. It has no promise of short term results, and it is not interested in conversion but in witness. It takes seriously the fact that conversion is not our business but God's. The risks are not small. There is a great temptation to join the non-Christian in his beliefs, and this is the risk of empathy. It is a learning experience for both the Christian and non-Christian as both discover who Christ is in relation to both of them where they are. It is even possible that Christ will occasionally be met by the Christian in the non-Christian. The Christian does not bring Christ to the non-Christian, he meets Christ with him.

¹⁹Robert L. Slater, World Religions and World Community, p. 6.

A Final Word

This paper has attempted to survey the attitudes of the Christian to the non-Christian, both theologically and in actual approaches that are made. The theologians and missionaries have been allowed to speak for themselves, and to criticise each other's position. I think the positions have been fairly stated and relationships between the men clearly shown. Opinion is divided and the need is urgent. But the New Testament gives us one insight to the problem that must always be considered when we make a choice about the approach to the non-Christian--and this is true equally for the secular non-Christian as it is for the religious non-Christian. Jesus did not make any statements about non-Jewish religions, although many of the soldiers resident within Palestine were probably Mithraites. He certainly was not interested in the other religions in the sense that we in our times seem to be. But he was interested in living persons, Samaritans and Centurions, whoever they might be and however they viewed the world. He was present among them. This is the incarnational approach.

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